

THE INEFFABLE IMMEDIATELY INCARNATE. INTERPLAY BETWEEN TWENTIETH-CENTURY
FRENCH NEOPLATONISM AND HEIDEGGER.

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“Augustine remained especially at home there [in the Catholic Church] until the modern Catholic school of apologetics in France, which at the same time appropriated Bergsonian ideas (which, in turn, were determined by Plotinus.)”¹

If I knew enough to do justice to my title, I would commence with this suggestive and problematic judgment at the beginning of Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976) 1921 lectures on “Augustine and Neoplatonism” and, starting with Henri Bergson, trace the interplay between twentieth-century French Neoplatonism and Heidegger. However, I do not. Nonetheless, I do understand something about twentieth-century French Neoplatonism and its Heideggerian character— my brief *One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism in France*² is the only extended treatment.³ My essay has many limits. First, it looks only at the effect Heidegger had on French thinkers, making no endeavour to investigate what the German took from the French—is scholarship not generally prone to this one-sidedness in favour of the German side of any intellectual meeting? Second, I did not trace how—by reading what works? when?—Heidegger's thought effected the influence it undoubtedly had. Happily, others have laboured at this,⁴ and fortunately, a young Italian scholar, Luca Lera, who is about to receive his doctorate from the Università degli Studi di Pisa, has made some progress in considering what of French Neoplatonism Heidegger knew. His thesis⁵ will underlie an article he is publishing in the next issue of *Dionysius*: “Heidegger's ‘Lese- und Lebemeister.’ Eckhart as the Neoplatonic ‘Hidden Source’ of Heidegger's Thought.” Largely

¹ Martin Heidegger, “Augustine and Neo-Platonism,” in *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), “Introductory Part,” 115. This volume of translations by Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei contains the “Augustine and Neo-Platonism” of 1921, and the “Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion,” Winter Semester 1920-21, and “The Philosophical Foundations of Medieval Mysticism,” which are outlines and sketches for a Lecture, not held, 1918-19.

² W.J. Hankey, *One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism in France: A Brief Philosophical History*, by Wayne Hankey (pages 97-248), published with *Levinas and the Greek Heritage*, by Jean-Marc Narbonne (pages 1-96), Studies in Philosophical Theology (Leuven/Paris/Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2006). This is my translation and expansion of my *Cent Ans De Néoplatonisme En France: Une Brève Histoire Philosophique*, par Wayne Hankey (pages 123-268), Collection Zêtêsis (Paris/Québec, Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin/Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2004).

³ Beginnings may be found with Alain Ph. Segonds. “Liminaire,” in *Proclus et la Théologie Platonicienne. Actes du Colloque International de Louvain (13-16 mai 1998) en l'honneur de H.D. Saffrey et L.G. Westerink*, édité par A.Ph. Segonds et C. Steel, Ancient and Medieval Philosophy De Wulf-Mansion Centre Series I, XXVI (Leuven/Paris: Leuven University Press/Les Belles Lettres, 2000), ix–xxv1 and Jacob Schmutz, “Escaping the Aristotelian Bond: the Critique of Metaphysics in Twentieth-Century French Philosophy,” *Dionysius* 17 (1999): 169–200. On the matters of interest to us, Philippe Capelle, “Neoplatonism and Contemporary Philosophy,” for Neoplatonism and Contemporary Philosophy: International Society for Neoplatonic Studies Meeting in Québec 2006 is substantially derived from my *Cent Ans De Néoplatonisme En France*.

⁴ I mention particularly the late lamented Dominique Janicaud's (1937-2002), *Heidegger en France*, 2 vols. Idées (Paris: Albin Michel, 2001), but it is not particularly concerned with Neoplatonism, and it says nothing about many of the formative figures who gave that movement its distinctive character in the 20th-century.

⁵ Entitled *Il fascino dell'origine. Meister Eckhart “Lese- und Lebemeister” di Heidegger*.

either because of what I have learned directly from him, or from that to which he has pointed me, this paper can have a secondary aspect, suggesting a little of what Heidegger knew about, and may owe to, the French with whom we are concerned. The substance of my paper today will reiterate my thesis that a distinctive form of Neoplatonism developed in twentieth-century France and that, either because of influence and interchange, or because of a like-mindedness, what characterised it had a shape which some of Heidegger's work shared.

Before moving to a few interchanges and coherences between Heidegger and twentieth-century French Neoplatonism, I should say a word about what I regard as the general ironic connection between Neoplatonism and Heideggerian questioning.⁶ Because of Heidegger's *Seinsfrage*, scholars either presented Platonism in order to reveal the faults of Heidegger's account, or they turned to Neoplatonism, having accepted Heidegger's critique of metaphysics as onto-theology, in order to find an alternative way for Western philosophy, theology, and religion. For example, our understanding of Aquinas was much affected and these alternatives emerged: (1) Neoplatonisms were developed in opposition to Thomism as the paradigm of the worst onto-theological metaphysics. (2) Alternatively, Aquinas' own thought was reinterpreted in a Neoplatonic fashion, using his connection to the Pseudo-Dionysius, and his likeness to Meister Eckhart, in order to turn his teaching into a negative or mystical theology. Thus, it appeared as the very opposite of ontological and rationalist Thomism.⁷ (3) Or, in a more balanced approach, Aquinas' thought was located with respect to a Platonic henology, on the one hand, and to an Aristotelian "metaphysics of pure being," on the other hand, both constructions of a history of metaphysics rethought through Neoplatonism.⁸ (4) Recently, this last approach has been pushed further. The Heideggerian history itself, and the alternative fundamental philosophy to which it belongs, are called into question and the various Neoplatonisms, among which Thomas' theology is numbered, are defended against Heidegger's characterisation of metaphysics, on the grounds that they do not match what he describes, and that, whatever the problems with Neoplatonic metaphysics, they are not so great as that to which Heidegger would lead us instead. Jean-Marc Narbonne's *Hénologie, Ontologie et Ereignis (Plotin-Proclus-Heidegger)* is the best example of the last approach and is also the most complete examination to date of the relations between Heidegger and Neoplatonism.⁹

Narbonne joins others in showing that, although even the henological systems have "katholou-prôtologique" metaphysical structures, these do not place them fatally within the dilemmas of onto-theology, and that, by representing them in this way, Heidegger does them unacceptable violence. Narbonne writes about Heidegger's representation:

⁶ See my "Why Heidegger's "History" of Metaphysics is Dead," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 78:3 (2004): 425-443.

⁷ John D. Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas. An Essay in Overcoming Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982) provides an example.

⁸ Much of my own work on Aquinas may be located here. My Oxford D.Phil. thesis published as *God in Himself, Aquinas' Doctrine of God as Expounded in the Summa Theologiae*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) and reprinted in 2000 in the series Oxford Scholarly Classics was undertaken in to opposition a Heideggerian representation of Aquinas doctrine of being, which I countered by placing Aquinas within the history of Neoplatonism. This comes out in an article based on the concluding chapter of the thesis which was not published in the monograph: "Making Theology Practical: Thomas Aquinas and the Nineteenth Century Religious Revival," *Dionysius*, 9 (1985): 85-127. The then Lady Margaret Professor, Dr Ian MacQuarrie, supervised the dissertation with his usual charity, generosity, humility, and care.

⁹ Jean-Marc Narbonne, *Hénologie, Ontologie et Ereignis (Plotin-Proclus-Heidegger)*, L'âne d'or (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2001).

Rather than a pure and simple ignorance of the Neoplatonic tradition—in itself not very probable—one would be inclined to speak in his case... both of a misunderstanding and of a banalisation of this current of thought. The beyond being of the Neoplatonists, the One freed from all the limitations of beings, located beyond thought and objectification..., in itself infinite and incomprehensible, all that, with Heidegger, is apparently reduced or brought back to a simple case of *Stufen des Seienden*, of degrees or stages of being, understood as a continuous series, without the decisive opening by the One in the direction of the infinite and the rupture of the totality of being which it introduces ever being recognised.¹⁰

Heidegger's own thought contains important features which are common to him and the Neoplatonists, such as the positive necessity of nothingness, and the non-existence and ineffability of the fundamental ground. Narbonne judges that Heidegger's language here is no less paradoxical than that of the Neoplatonists. Moreover, when the *Ereignis* is examined through the eyes of Emmanuel Lévinas (1906-1995), it is far from clear that this is a better account of the primal than the Neoplatonists give.

Narbonne's liberating study invites more complete explorations of the relation between Heidegger and Neoplatonism. This is Luca Lera's enterprise and I am grateful for being able to take advantage of it.

THE END IS IN THE BEGINNING: FROM HENRI BERGSON TO MICHEL HENRY

It is not difficult to sketch a somewhat irregular Neoplatonic ellipse with more than one focus beginning with Bergson (1859-1941) and turning back to its start with Michel Henry (1922-2003). They share the logic I reduce to a formula as "the ineffable immediately incarnate," and, as with Heidegger, this involves the primacy they give to life—even though its signification is quite different for each of these three. As Heidegger indicates, what moves Bergson has an important relation to Neoplatonism through Plotinus, although this relation is deeply ambiguous. In contrast, Henry's connection to Neoplatonism is through Meister Eckhart, something he shares with Heidegger,¹¹ and is thus to a significantly different tradition within that movement than what attracted and repelled Bergson.

Beyond what he owed to Augustine, and thus to Plotinus, Eckhart is under the influence of the Iamblichan tradition of Neoplatonism we largely associate with Proclus. A sympathy for this tradition, simultaneously incarnational and theurgic, and also so strongly apophatic that it pushes beyond negation to silence before a nothingness by excess which some of its authors will not even name as the One, gives French Neoplatonism in the second half of the twentieth century its particular character. Besides meeting this Neoplatonism through whatever he knows of Greek Fathers like Gregory of Nyssa, Eckhart encounters it either directly, by way of the *Elements of Theology*, or indirectly, by way of the *Liber de causis*, the pseudo-Dionysius, Eriugena, Avicenna, Moses Maimonides, and Thomas

¹⁰ Narbonne, *Hénologie, ontologie et Ereignis*, 195–6.

¹¹ Besides what I derive from Luca Lera and Michel Henry, I depend largely on John D. Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1978), Reiner Schürmann, *Meister Eckhart. Mystic and Philosopher*, Translations with Commentary (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978) although I tend to think that Schürmann's judgment of Caputo "generally speaking, Caputo seems to me more reliable on Heidegger than on Eckhart," 255, holds also for him, and Philippe Capelle, *Philosophie et théologie dans la pensée de Martin Heidegger* (Paris: Cerf, 1998), 217-221.

Aquinas. Like Aquinas, but in contrast to other Rhenish mystics and Nicholas of Cusa, Eckhart probably did not read Moerbeke's translation of Proclus' commentary on the *Parmenides*, where the nothingness of what is both first and last, is more deeply considered than in the *Elements*.¹² Heidegger is implicated in both traditions of Neoplatonism by way of early reflections on Augustine and Plotinus (1921),¹³ as well as through a still earlier considerations of Eckhart (1918-19), and of the sources of Eckhart's Neoplatonism, some of which he lists when considering the origins of the medieval distinction between essence and existence in his lecture course for the Summer of 1927, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*.¹⁴ There, a little after his survey of these sources, we find his well-known (and, problematic)¹⁵ remarks on Eckhart's mystical theology in terms of "the doctrine of *essentia* and *existentia*." Heidegger writes:

It is the characteristic quality of *medieval mysticism* that it tries to lay hold of the being ontologically rated as the properly essential being, God, in his very essence. In this attempt mysticism arrives at a peculiar speculation, peculiar because it transforms the idea of essence in general, which is an ontological determination of a being, the *essentia entis*, into what is properly actual. This remarkable alteration of essence into a being is the presupposition for the possibility of what is called mystical speculation. Therefore, Meister Eckhart, speaks mostly of the "superessential essence"; that is to say, what interests him is not, strictly speaking, God—God is still a provisional object for him—but Godhead. When Meister Eckhart says "God" he means Godhead, not *deus* but *deitas*, not *ens* but *essentia*, not nature but what is above nature, the essence—the essence to which, as it were, every existential determination must be refused...¹⁶

After quoting Eckhart on the non-being of God, Heidegger continues, using Hegel to understand nothingness and the mystic encounter:

¹² See my "Misrepresenting Neoplatonism in Contemporary Christian Dionysian Polemic: Eriugena and Nicholas of Cusa versus Vladimir Lossky and Jean-Luc Marion," for the *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, forthcoming; with its references to C. Steel (ed.), Proclus, *Commentaire sur le Parménide de Platon. Traduction de Guillaume de Moerbeke. Tome I: Livres I à IV* (Leuven/ Leiden: Leuven University Press/ Brill, 1982), 34*-42*, A. de Libera, *La Mystique rhénane d'Albert le Grand à Maître Eckhart* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), 30, and S. Gersh, "Berthold von Moosburg on the Content and Method of Platonic Philosophy," [2001] reprinted in idem, *Reading Plato, Tracing Plato* (Aldershot: Ashgate / Variorum, 2005), 493-94.

¹³ On this aspect I rely here primarily on the documents translated in *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, on the essays gathered in *The Influence of Augustine on Heidegger: The Emergence of an Augustinian Phenomenology*, ed. Craig J. N. de Paulo (The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), especially that of Theodore Kisiel, "Situating Augustine in Salvation History, Philosophy's History and Heidegger's History," 53-88, and Philippe Capelle, "Heidegger: Reader of Augustine," in *Augustine and Postmodernism*, eds. J.D. Caputo and M.J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 115-126. The only treatment of Heidegger's relation to both traditions known to me is Narbonne's *Hénologie, ontologie et Ereignis*.

¹⁴ Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Translation, Introduction, and Lexicon by Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), Chapter 2, §10 [113-114], 81: Avicenna, the *Liber de causis*, Plotinus, Proclus, Iamblichus, and Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite. I owe this reference to Luca Lera.

¹⁵ In light of the deeper reflections of Jean Trouillard and his associates. I also mention my own analyses of the treatment of the essence and existence of God in Aquinas' *Summa theologiae* which looks at it within the history of Neoplatonism (e.g. my *God in Himself*) and that of Narbonne in *Hénologie, ontologie et Ereignis*.

¹⁶ Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Chapter 2, §10 [128-129], 90-91. See the remarks of Laurence Paul Hemming in *Heidegger's Atheism. The Refusal of a Theological Voice* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 14.

This God is for himself his “not”; that is to say, he is the most universal being, the purest indeterminate possibility of everything possible, pure nothing. He is nothing over against every determinate possible and actualized being. Here, too, we find a remarkable parallel to the Hegelian determination of being and its identification with nothing.¹⁷

The concluding remark is confusing, given the very negative judgment of Hegel on Neoplatonic mysticism:

The mysticism of the Middle Ages, or, more precisely, its mystical theology is not mystical in our sense and in the bad sense [the Hegelian sense?]; rather, it can be conceived in a completely eminent sense.¹⁸

For Hegel, that would mean intellectualising it.

In Heidegger’s Summer 1931 course on *Aristotle’s Metaphysics* Θ 1-3, Eckhart appears in much the same light when he comments on the *analogia entis*. Heidegger refers to the indubitable problems of the doctrine, which he says “had been handed down to the theology of the Middle Ages via Plotinus.” It was thus a Neoplatonic “problem” and has the characteristics he ascribes to Neoplatonism. It was not real philosophical thinking, it was not “a solution but a formula,” “a welcomed means of formulating a religious conviction in philosophical terms.”¹⁹ However, one figure did some real thinking:

Meister Eckhart—the only one who sought a solution [to the dilemmas]—says: “God” ‘is’ not at all, because ‘being’ is a finite predicate and absolutely cannot be said of God.” (This was admittedly only a beginning which disappeared in Eckhart’s later development, although it remained alive in his thinking in another aspect.)²⁰

Thus, because he engages Bergson and both Neoplatonic traditions, and because he is important to Henry’s working out of his phenomenology, Heidegger is within the irregular circle we trace. Nonetheless, it is important that, according to Heidegger, Eckhart is not thinking radically because he is deeply Neoplatonic, but in spite of that. By the end of this decade, Heidegger is explicit that Neoplatonism, because of its association with Christianity, or late ancient religion, is no longer part of the “great Greek Philosophy.”²¹ He seems to

¹⁷ Ibid., Chapter 2, §10 [129], 91. See the remarks of Daniel Wilband, “Much Ado about Nothing: A Note on Trouillard’s Use of Proclus,” *Dionysius* 24 (2006): 209-22.

¹⁸ Ibid., Chapter 2, §10 [129], 91.

¹⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Aristotle’s Metaphysics* Θ 1-3: *On the Essence and Actuality of Force*, trans. Walter Brogan and Peter Warnek, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), Introduction, §6, 38.

²⁰ Ibid., 38. See Hemming’s remarks in *Heidegger’s Atheism*, 197.

²¹ Martin Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy. Selected “Problems” of “Logic”*, translated by R. Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), Appendix III.8 from the first draft, p. 185: “the great Greek philosophy, whose beginning and end are attached to the names Anaximander and Aristotle. What arises later as so-called ‘Greek philosophy’ has another character, no longer the original: what we then have are either scholastic trends... or practical-moral philosophies like those of the Stoa and Epicurus, or even attempts at a renaissance of the ancient Greek philosophy under the influence of Christian faith or the religious systems of later antiquity, renaissances which go by the name of Neoplatonism. Subsequently, all these ‘philosophies’ became historically more influential than the genuine and originally great Greek philosophy. The ground of this fact resides in the linkage with Christianity. The great Greek philosophy fell more and more into oblivion....”

have returned in the thirties to an importantly different version of his first conception of the mysticism of Eckhart as a “counter-movement” against Scholasticism in terms of the “atheoretical” immediate religious experience of “the living subject.”²² However, Eckhart is no longer an exemplar of medieval mysticism but rather of German thinking.²³

The twentieth-century retrieval of Neoplatonism in France extends outside this circle, but Bergson starts it and, with him its purposes and peculiar modifications begin to show. It is generally opposed to the Western metaphysical tradition insofar as this is understood to determine modernity, and it is also generally anti-Idealist, endeavouring to link the sensuous and corporeal immediately with the first Principle. This second characteristic sets the twentieth-century retrieval against that in the nineteenth century, when Germany was its centre, and even to the ancient and medieval Neoplatonisms generally.

The fundamental character is established in the first half of the century. Besides Bergson, Émile Bréhier (1876-1952), the great historian of philosophy and the sole figure in the French history who adopts an Hegelian interpretation of Neoplatonism, is crucial, as are also the relations between Bréhier and André Festugière, the Dominican priest, who, in contradistinction to Bréhier and Bergson, worked on hermetic and post-Iamblichian Platonism, fusing Plato the mystic with Plato the intellectual, thus disgusting Bréhier. There may be connections between Heidegger and Bréhier for which Luca Lera and Daniel Wilband have argued, and the issues raised by Festugière’s fusion of philosophy and mysticism are important. This is why I mention him, even though the limits of this paper prevent my treating him today.

Bréhier, who attended Bergson’s lectures on Plotinus commented that: “Plotinus is one the very rare philosophers with whom Bergson felt an affinity... he treated him, as if he recognized himself in Plotinus.”²⁴ This may justify Heidegger’s assertion that Bergson’s ideas were “determined by Plotinus,” but, in fact, his evaluation of Plotinus was profoundly ambiguous, and he inverted the Plotinian system for his purposes. Bergson found in Plotinus not only a “dynamic schema”²⁵ which corresponded to his own understanding of reality, but also what for him comprised the most fundamental error of the metaphysical tradition, viz. the ignorance of the difference between intellect and the fluidity of reality. Indeed, for Bergson, Plotinus sums up and brings to an end the falsifying intellectualism of Greek philosophy:

... Action was a weakened Contemplation, duration a false, deceptive, and mobile image of immobile eternity, the Soul a fall of the Idea. The whole of that philosophy which begins with Plato and ends with Plotinus is the development of a principle

That Aristotle became the principal master of ‘philosophy’ in the middle ages does not contradict this, for on the one hand what was called philosophy in medieval times was not philosophy but only a preamble of reason on behalf of theology, as was required by faith. And, on the other hand, Aristotle was precisely therefore not understood in the Greek way, i.e. on the basis of the primordial thought and poetry of Greek Dasein, but in a medieval fashion, i.e., in a Arabic-Jewish-Christian way.

²² Martin Heidegger, “The Philosophical Foundations of Medieval Mysticism” (1918-19) in *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 238-41. There are no remarks about the greatness of Greek philosophy.

²³ For a brief account of previous representations of Eckhart as paradigmatically German, see Schürmann, *Meister Eckhart*, xi. Heidegger modifies these.

²⁴ É. Bréhier, “Images plotiniennes, images bergsoniennes,” (1949) in idem, *Les Études bergsoniennes*, tome 2 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), 107–108

²⁵ R.-M. Mossé-Bastide, *Bergson et Plotin*, Bibliothèque de philosophie contemporaine (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959), 8; see 2–9 for the ambiguity in Bergson’s citations of Plotinus.

that we should formulate thus: “There is more in the immutable than in the moving, and one passes from the stable to the unstable by a simple diminution.” Now the contrary is the truth.²⁶

Despite his making Plotinus philosophically significant, there is much here which reminds us of Heidegger, and, as with the atheist mystic of the Black Forest at early moments in his teaching, mysticism surpasses philosophy. Its final end for Bergson is “the establishment of a contact, consequently of a partial coincidence, with the creative effort which life itself manifests. This effort is of God, if it is not God himself.”²⁷ True or complete mysticism is very rare and would be simultaneously action, creation, and love. However, despite “impregnating” Greek intellectualism with mysticism, Plotinus was unable to overcome the limits the Hellenic tradition sets on experience; thus Bergson arrives at this final judgment: “In short, mysticism, in the absolute sense in which we have agreed to take the word, was never attained by Greek thought.”²⁸ This is usefully compared with the well-known remarks in Heidegger’s sketch for an undelivered lecture for 1918-19 on “The Philosophical Foundations of Medieval Mysticism.” There we encounter comments on Eckhart; just before these, is the following “Supplementary note”:

Already in the strongly natural-scientific, naturalistic theoretical metaphysics of being of Aristotle and its radical elimination and misrecognition of the problem of value in Plato, which is renewed in medieval Scholasticism, the predominance of the theoretical is already potentially present, so that Scholasticism, within the totality of the medieval Christian world of experience, severely endangered precisely the immediacy of religious life, and forgot religion in favour of theology and dogma. And already in the early days of Christianity, these dogmata exercised a theorizing, dogma-promoting influence on the institutions and statutes of church law. An appearance such as mysticism is to be understood as an elementary counter-movement.²⁹

With these fundamental and fatal flaws, what then does Bergson love in Plotinus? In fact, Bergson prizes not the goals which he supposes that Plotinus seeks but rather: 1) a mystical ecstasy which he judges Plotinus to have only partially attained, 2) the harmonious self-moving and self-explicating life of Soul, which Plotinus takes from Stoicism and which, significantly, lies at the bottom of the spiritual hierarchy as he represents it, and 3) despite his privileging of intellectual vision, the Plotinian attention to the experience of the individual soul.³⁰ In other words, he reverses Plotinus, placing him firmly on his feet in the experience of embodied life.

In respect to mysticism, Bergson seeks to remove the intellectual mediation, the *Nous* which is essential both to the way up and to the way down in Plotinus. Bergson wants to join immediately the bottom to the top, i.e. he connects the moving vital to a creative energy,

²⁶ H. Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, translated by M.L. Anderson (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1946) [*La Pensée et le mouvant, Essais et conférences*, from 1903 to 1923, 1^{ère} éd. 1934], 227–228.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 209.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Martin Heidegger, “The Philosophical Foundations of Medieval Mysticism,” in *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* [313-314], 238.

³⁰ See Mossé-Bastide, *Bergson et Plotin*, 3–9; Leszek Kolakowski, *Bergson*, Past Masters (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 82.

which is a pure love beyond what he conceives as the fixity of the intellectualised One of Plotinus. In the relation of life to thought, the intellectual is not for Bergson, as it was for Plotinus, the realm of perfect actuality, the always-complete motionless activity which the vitality of soul imitates weakly. Instead, for Bergson, inverting the locus of strength within the schema, intellectual effort shares the character of psychic life. He constructs a parallel between the intellectual and the vital, and seeks to understand how the material emerges from the immaterial, as Plotinus also does. However, whereas, for Plotinus, soul is an image of *Nous* which reigns over it, for Bergson, the vital is the paradigmatic and normative. Bergson's ideas here are determined in opposition to Plotinus, and, on this the twentieth-century thinkers with whom we are concerned, including Heidegger, will generally side with Bergson.

Michel Henry, at the end of the circular movement we would trace, gathers the crucial features it acquired in the development from Bergson. (1) Beginning with a rejection of modern metaphysics in its Cartesian origins, he (2) endeavours to find the transcendent within immanence. (3) This quest is undertaken by way of an examination of consciousness which avoids abstraction from life and the sensuous, because "a body is subjective and is the ego itself." Thus there is "a material phenomenology."³¹ (4) He engages Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger, and (5) unifies philosophy and religion with one another and with life. (6) God is the Unknown God. Finally, (7) Henry undertakes a positive engagement with Marx and locates atheism within, rather than outside, our philosophical and religious tradition.³²

Henry's approach complements that of Jean-Luc Marion (born 1946).³³ He turned not to Dionysius, but to Eckhart—although recognising Dionysius and Proclus as crucial sources for what attracts him to Eckhart.³⁴ Whereas Marion aims to prevent the reduction of the source of knowledge to the conditions of the subject, Henry wants to protect the affectivity of the subject against objectification and his analysis is of its internal structure. He does this by unifying the soul with the ontological structure of the absolute. Henry, commenting on one of the passages which also continuously engaged Heidegger, writes that according to Eckhart:

[I]t is the absolute who, in the accomplishment of his task, constitutes the essence of the soul, the essence which as such is not different from this work, or as Eckhart

³¹ M. Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, translated by Girard J. Etkorn (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975) [*Philosophie et phénoménologie du corps. Essai sur l'ontologie biranienne*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965], 11; see M. Lemoine, "Affectivité et auto-affectation: Réflexions sur le «corps subjectif» chez Maine de Biran et M. Henry," *Les Études philosophiques* (avril-juin, 2000).

³² M. Henry, *Marx. A Philosophy of Human Reality*, translated by Kathleen McLaughlin (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983); idem, *The Essence of Manifestation*, translated by Girard J. Etkorn (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973) [*L'Essence de la manifestation*. 2 tomes, Épiméthée. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963], 429; idem, *I Am the Truth: Towards a Philosophy of Christianity*, translated by Susan Emanuel, *Cultural Memory in the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) [*C'est moi la vérité. Pour une philosophie du christianisme*. Paris: Seuil, 1996], 237–47.

³³ For a recognition by Marion of the Henry's work on the auto-affectivity of the subject despite their differences, see Marion, *Being Given. Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, translated by Jeffrey L. Kosky, *Cultural Memory in the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) [*Étant Donnée. Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation*. Épiméthée. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997], 231 and 366, n. 86.

³⁴ M. Henry, "La signification ontologique de la critique de la connaissance chez Eckhart"; idem, "Speech and Religion: The Word of God," in Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate*, 216–241 at 223ff. See N. Depraz, "Seeking a phenomenological metaphysics"; S. Laoureux, "De 'L'essence de la manifestation"; and S. Breton, *Deux Mystiques de l'excès: J.-J. Surin et Maître Eckhart* (Paris: Cerf, 1985).

says, from the operation of God. “When God made man,” he declares, “he put into the soul his equal, his acting, everlasting masterpiece. It was so great a work that it could not be otherwise than the soul and *the soul could not be otherwise than the work of God.*” The identity here affirmed between the essence of the soul and the operation of God must be understood in its radical meaning. For the operation with which the soul is identified in its essence in no way adds, as would a creation strictly speaking, to the original and ultimate Being of God himself; it in no way constitutes anything extrinsic in relation to him but is rather identified with his own foundation.³⁵

While ultimately unifying philosophy and revelation, Henry understands the propriety of the post-Heideggerian determination not “to submit God to the priority of Being,” and judges that “one can well say ‘God is,’ but, as Being itself is subordinated to the givenness of appearing, the meaning of God is decided only in the latter.”³⁶ Against Heidegger, in the archetypical Neoplatonic move, Henry subordinates Being to the unknown:

One must therefore reverse Heidegger’s propositions, according to which “the experience of God and of his manifestedness, to the extent that the latter can indeed meet man, flashes in the dimension of Being”; “the sacred...comes into the light of appearing only when Being has been clarified beforehand.” For it is only when this light of appearing is extinguished, outside the clearing of Being, that access to the Immemorial is possible—in Oblivion. The Oblivion that passes beyond all memory belonging to thought, and thus all conceivable Memory, gives us access to the Immemorial.³⁷

Thus, Henry, who turned to Eckhart through the mediation of Heidegger, has found in Eckhart a way around Heidegger.³⁸ Through Eckhart, he constructs a metaphysical phenomenology and also finds a way to unite philosophy and religion.

Among those overthrowing the reign of *Nous* or uniting philosophy and religion, we may not, however, count Bréhier. Luca Lera has discerned a probable influence of the great Plotinus scholar on Heidegger. This counters a movement the other way posited by Daniel Wilband. Bréhier presents two sides of Neoplatonism and, at the very least, establishes a problematic within which Heidegger makes his decisions. However, it is in relation to Heidegger, that Wilband sees Bréhier take one Neoplatonic path, while Jean Trouillard (and others like Henry) take the opposite way.³⁹

BRÉHIER, TROUILLARD, AND HEIDEGGER: A TWO-WAY STREET.

³⁵ Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, 309–10.

³⁶ Henry, “Speech and Religion,” 228.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 229, quoting Heidegger “Seminar at Zurich” also cited by Marion, *God without Being*, 61, and Heidegger, *Questions III: Le chemin de campagne; L’expérience de la pensée*, traduit de l’allemand par André Préau, Roger Munier, et Julien Hervier (Paris: Gallimard, 1966); see also, for the same rejection of Heidegger, Henry, *I Am the Truth*, 157.

³⁸ On the Heideggerian mediation, see D. Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”*: *The French Debate*, Dominique Janicaud, Jean-François Courtine, Jean-Louis Chrétien, Michel Henry, Jean-Luc Marion, Paul Ricoeur, Perspectives in Continental Philosophy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 70 & 76.

³⁹ Wilband, “Much Ado about Nothing”: 213: “Martin Heidegger’s early work, published throughout the 1920s, appears to have influenced Bréhier’s departure from the approach he took in 1919.”

Bréhier confronts us with two opposed Neoplatonisms. One is exposed in a early article praised by the deepest and most creative Neoplatonist of the twentieth-century, Jean Trouillard, who paradigmatically explicates the principle as “the ineffable immediately incarnate.” The other appears in Bréhier’s representation of Plotinus in Hegelian terms—ones which Heidegger also sometimes employs.

Trouillard was the first to undertake a Catholic philosophical and theological revolution which substituted for Aristotelian-Thomist ontology a Proclean henology based in the interplay in the self-constitution of soul of Nothingness by excess and Nothingness by defect. The revolution also reorders the relation of religion and reason. Mystagogy is the heart of religion and of philosophy because of the *One-in-us*. In virtue of its being in the Nothingness of the One, the soul unfolds the entire procession and the material is indispensable to the return, hence theurgy (sacramental religion). The choice of Proclus beyond an earlier devotion to Plotinus is essential. Trouillard perceived that the universe was united in very different ways for these two. For Proclus, the One was present and powerful throughout the whole, even in the material. After noting “the well-known divergence,” between the rationalists Plotinus and Porphyry, on the one hand,” and “and Iamblichus, Syrianus, Nestorius, and Proclus, on the other, who give first place to the *Chaldaean Oracles* and theurgy,” in the Preface to his translation of the *Elements of Theology*, he writes:

The important thing here is the repercussion of this difference in the system of Proclus as compared to the approach of the *Enneads*. Plotinus returns to the One through a severe negation, or, better, he gives way to a purifying motion which, springing out of the ecstasy hidden in each of us, detaches it first from the empirical world, and then from intellectual vision....If Plotinus ultimately saves nature and the forms, he keeps them at a two-fold distance. He goes to the divinity by night. Proclus shows rather a will for transfiguration. Without doubt his universe is arranged on horizontal planes like that of Plotinus, but it is also traversed by a series of vertical lines, which like rays diverge from the same universal center and refer back to it the furthestmost and the most diverse appearances. These chains tend to absorb the hierarchical ordering of the levels and to link them all directly to the One.... The sensible is thus susceptible to a transposition and a purification which announces and perhaps prepares for the intelligible expanse of the Cartesians....A stone is itself able to participate in the divine power to purify. To tell the truth, this primacy of theurgy which disconcerts reason is again a form of night and accentuates the mystery. But it also reveals the concern for integration and continuity which in Proclus reminds one of Leibniz.⁴⁰

Trouillard realized that “Proclus must be interpreted in what we now call the register of immanence and that of transcendence, at the same time.”⁴¹ The principle of such an immediate union of the transcendent ineffable and the sensuous is Nothingness by excess. This is not the nothing of Hegel, or of a Hegelian Heidegger, which is the indeterminate. Rather, the character of the nothing of Proclus, as the heir of Iamblichus, exposes itself when what proceeds first from the One are both limit and unlimited. Thus, the principle of matter is at the top of the system, but the Primal is also revealed as positively full.

⁴⁰ Jean Trouillard, “Préface,” in Proclus, *Éléments de Théologie*, traduction, introduction, et notes par Jean Trouillard, Bibliothèque philosophique (Paris: Aubier, 1965), 23–25.

⁴¹ J. Trouillard, *L’un et l’âme selon Proclus* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1972), 4.

Iamblichus justifies theurgy in the *De Mysteriis* because matter belongs to the gods and can be the holy means of their uplifting activity. For both him and Proclus the human soul is altogether descended into genesis; against Plotinus, no part of it remains in *NOUS*, and Proclus devotes his *De malorum subsistentia* to showing, also against Plotinus, that matter is neither evil nor evil's cause.

If Trouillard moved from Plotinus to Proclus, Bréhier moved the other way. He deals with Nothingness in an article written in 1919 whose importance was recognised by Trouillard, who praised the "isolated initiative" as "une belle étude."⁴² Bréhier's analysis is entitled, "The Idea of Nothingness and the Problem of the Radical Origin in Greek Neoplatonism." In it he showed that he understood the basis in Neoplatonism for the religion, mystical theology, and negative henology found there later, especially by priests like Jean Trouillard. These would be joined by Pierre Hadot and others in bringing about the re-evaluation of these aspects of the Platonic tradition. Pierre Aubenque describes, in a way which will recall Heidegger, the Neoplatonic endeavour to prevent the One as source of being from becoming itself an entity. He explains the problematic of Bréhier's *belle étude*:

É. Bréhier commented very well on this movement of thought, which characterises under diverse forms all of Neoplatonism, when he writes: "The origin [of being] is not able as such to possess any of the characteristics which are possessed by the beings to be explained or derived, because then it would be one thing among other things, one being among other beings. But, possessing none of the characteristics of beings, it appears to the thinking which tries to grasp it as a pure non-being, a nothingness of being." Let us for now leave open the question, raised by Bréhier, of knowing if to make of this non-being the one, is not to "determine" it and, as a result, to make it once again into a being, apropos of which "because it is a being, one would be required once again to ask what is its origin." It remains that the relativisation of ontology, and the correlative necessity of passing beyond it, are logically inscribed in the question, considered radically, of the Being of the existent [*l'être de l'étant*].⁴³

As Aubenque hints, Bréhier went on in this article to explore the confounding of two opposite elements in Neoplatonism, summing up the difficulty in this problematic formula: "if nothingness is what underlies all reality, the origin is, on the contrary, what is above."⁴⁴ He searches the history of Neoplatonism beginning with Plotinus, travelling by way of his successors up to Proclus, and concluding with Damascius, trying to discern what this formula means and to discover "if and how the two terms, both of them situated outside all thinkable reality, can be prevented from being confounded with one another."⁴⁵ Trouillard, and the Neoplatonic radicals associated with him, will take up this search again in the second half of the twentieth century.

Wilband gives a thorough account of the article and shows that for Bréhier: "Proclean negation does not indicate the One's *deprivation* of certain characteristics, but rather

⁴² Trouillard, "Préface," in Proclus, *Éléments de Théologie*, 10.

⁴³ P. Aubenque, "Plotin et le dépassement de l'ontologie grecque classique," in Hadot (éd.) *Le Néoplatonisme*, 101–108 at 103, quoting from É. Bréhier, "L'idée du néant," 248; see also his "Mysticisme et doctrine chez Plotin," (1948) 225–31.

⁴⁴ É. Bréhier, "L'idée du néant et le problème de l'origine radicale dans le néoplatonisme grec," in idem, *Études de philosophie antique*, 248–283 at 250.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

shows its *liberty from* any essential predication whatever.”⁴⁶ Its liberation from essence is a power over it and “negations are not only superior to affirmations but they are even productive of them.”⁴⁷ Trouillard will repeat these positions. However, as Wilband explains, “In Bréhier’s final view, the One’s unspeakable nothingness is a real ‘problem’ without a solution in the Neoplatonic tradition itself. It expresses philosophy’s historical need to overcome ‘the intimate link of Greek intellectualism with the linguistic expression of thought.’”⁴⁸ He reports correctly, using my *One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism*, that “Bréhier’s later work tries...to isolate the intellectualist in Plotinus,” turning against the non-intellectual, ritualistic pragmatism of Iamblichus and Proclus.⁴⁹ Wilband judges that:

By 1928, concerned with preserving the purity of Western philosophical reason, Bréhier is fully persuaded by Hegel’s reading of Plotinus. Bréhier writes: ‘the idea of the Plotinian philosophy is an intellectualism or an elevated idealism,’⁵⁰ wherein ‘Plotinus had the idea that the essence of God is thought itself and that the essence is present in thought.’⁵¹

Against Eric R. Dodds, Regius Professor of Greek here, who showed its Greek origins, and convinced the rest of twentieth-century Neoplatonic scholarship, Bréhier sided with Hegel and attributed the mysticism of Plotinus to Oriental influences.⁵² For Bréhier, this element is not Greek:

[W]e find at the very center of Plotinus’ thought a foreign element which defies classification. The theory of Intelligence as universal being derives neither from Greek rationalism nor from the piety diffused throughout the religious circles of his day.... Thus I am led to seek the source of the philosophy of Plotinus beyond the Orient close to Greece, in the religious speculations of India, which by the time of Plotinus had been founded for centuries on the Upanishads and had retained their vitality.... With Plotinus, then, we lay hold of the first link in a religious tradition which is no less powerful basically in the West than the Christian tradition, although it does not manifest itself in the same way. I believe that this tradition comes from India.⁵³

As an explanation for this shift Wilband supposes that Bréhier is choosing Hegel’s treatment of Nothingness as against Heidegger’s. He employs Eli Diamond’s analysis of Heidegger’s purpose in ‘What Is Metaphysics?’⁵⁴ (1929). For Diamond, Heidegger:

⁴⁶ Wilband, “Much Ado about Nothing”: 212.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Wilband quoting Bréhier, “L’idée du néant,” 475 (Wilband uses the original pagination, in *Revue de métaphysique et morale* 26 (1919): 443-475, I use the numeration in the reprint in Bréhier’s *Études de philosophie antique*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955).

⁴⁹ See É. Bréhier, *The History of Philosophy*, vol. 2, 204. (Wilband’s note).

⁵⁰ Wilband, quoting Bréhier, *La philosophie de Plotin* (Paris: Boivin, 1928), 181.

⁵¹ Wilband, “Much Ado about Nothing”: 213 quoting Bréhier, *La philosophie de Plotin*, 180.

⁵² See W.J. Hankey, “Re-evaluating E.R. Dodds’ Platonism,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 103 (2007): 499–541.

⁵³ Bréhier, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, 116–18.

⁵⁴ Martin Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” in *Basic Writings* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1993).

is self-consciously attempting to undermine the necessity of the first determination in Hegel's 'Doctrine of Being,' the absolute identity of indeterminate Being and Nothing. In opposition to this first determination, Heidegger attempts to show how these two nearly indistinguishable terms belong together.⁵⁵

Luca Lera supposes that it is just as probable that Heidegger was reading Bréhier and learned something about the history of Nothingness from him.⁵⁶ Both Wilband and Lera may be right. In any case, we can assert that when Jean Trouillard and his followers developed their Neoplatonic response to Heidegger what they wrote was more Heideggerian than Hegelian,⁵⁷ more Proclean than Plotinian.

Before his works expositing Proclus, Trouillard, told us that the Platonic tradition brings before us: "the infinity of absence which all presence implies, more exactly the positivity and efficacy of this absence."⁵⁸ He goes on: "If then the normative dominates presence and absence both, if it commands both possession and privation, the name Being [*Être*] seems badly chosen to designate it. The normative is beyond ontology [une hyperontologie]."⁵⁹ Wilband gives a convincing comparison between Heidegger's account of how the Nothing functions as the condition of negation and of thought and Trouillard's account of how the One-in-us as Nothingness by excess enables the soul to constitute its life by productive negation. Certainly, he is right that what Trouillard brings out of Proclus is close to statements like these from 'What Is Metaphysics?':

the nothing is more original than the 'not' and negation. If this thesis is right, then the possibility of negation as an act of intellect, and thereby the intellect itself, are somehow dependent upon the nothing. Then how can the intellect hope to decide about the nothing?

Only on the ground of the original revelation of the nothing can human existence approach and penetrate beings.... It emerges as such existence in each case from the nothing already revealed. Da-sein means: being held out into the nothing. Holding itself out into the nothing, Dasein is in each case already beyond beings as a whole. This being beyond beings we call 'transcendence.'⁶⁰

Wilband concludes, correctly in my view:

For Heidegger, and also for Proclus: "we cannot even bring ourselves originally before the nothing through our own decision and will."⁶¹ The relation between the

⁵⁵ Eli Diamond, "Hegel on Being and Nothing: Some Contemporary Neoplatonic and Sceptical Responses," *Dionysius* XVIII (2000): 183-216 at 199.

⁵⁶ Lera writes "Bréhier's article [of 1919] written when Heidegger was still young and unknown, could have influenced Heidegger himself."

⁵⁷ For a fundamental rejection of Hegel see J. Trouillard, "Pluralité spirituelle et unité normative selon Blondel" (1961): 23.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*: 27.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*: 28.

⁶⁰ Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?" 100 & 105.

⁶¹ Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?" 108.

Heideggerian *nothing* and *Dasein* is analogous to that between the Proclean One and the soul, as Trouillard interprets them.⁶²

Crucially also for the comparison, as Bréhier discerns, the Proclean soul moves toward Nothingness by excess, and away from defective nothingness, not in virtue of an intellectual discrimination, but by “sentiments” and an “extralogical notion.”⁶³ Thus, for the critical movement, intellect fails, and we enter the sphere of religion and mystery. Bréhier, certainly, turned his face against such undermining of the autonomy of reason.

Whatever the connections between Bréhier and Heidegger may be, Trouillard’s Heideggerian inspiration cannot be doubted, and it belongs to his Proclean mystical theology in which the ineffable is immediately incarnate.

CONCLUDING REMARK

In part, Luca Lera’s article for *Dionysius* seeks to explain Heidegger’s negative evaluation of Neoplatonism—a question Jean-Marc Narbonne leaves open, having found that Heidegger was not ignorant of Neoplatonism, yet continually misrepresented what is most fundamental to it. Lera locates the problem in an anti-Jewish twist, which Heidegger gives to Hegel and Bréhier. Accepting their common ascription of the mystical to the Oriental, it seems to me that Heidegger intensifies a new opposition Bréhier sets up. Bréhier couples the mystical and the religious, which, in his early study of Philo,⁶⁴ are associated with Judaism, and opposed these to philosophy, “a fragile plant,” which he sought to discern and protect.⁶⁵ Yet there is no desperation with Bréhier. For him the mixture of religion and philosophy in Philo had “a certain rhythm, a certain elegance of thought...with his allegorical method, which, as totally absurd as it appears to be, does not any the less indicate an essential process of the human spirit, that which moves from the image to the idea.”⁶⁶ Equally for him, reason was purified and strengthened by its subordination to Christianity in the Middle Ages, and he attributes this view to Comte and Hegel.⁶⁷ Heidegger shows no such confidence in philosophy, which he associates with the Greek and the German, and sets against the “Jewish-Christian,” where he places mysticism and religion; what obscures the “great.” Not without some inconsistencies, Neoplatonism is located there. I quote Lera:

As we have seen, in the course of 1921, Heidegger says that the Neoplatonic doctrine of the First Principle prevented Augustine—and Christian thinkers in

⁶² For a similar conclusion see Albert Peter Durigon, *Heidegger And The Greeks: Hermeneutical-Philosophical Sketches Of Ignorance, Blindness And Not-Being In Heidegger's Beiträge Plato, Plotinus And Proclus*, Doctor of Philosophy dissertation for the Centre for the Study of the Hellenic Traditions, Trinity College, Dublin, 1998 found on-line at <http://www.geocities.com/peterdurigon/>.

⁶³ See Wilband, “Much Ado about Nothing”: 212; and Bréhier, “L’idée du néant”: 268: “C’est donc par une notion extralogique, par la notion de direction, que le non-être du Premier est distingué du non-être de la matière; ils sont distincts comme notre sentiment de plénitude et de fécondité est distinct du sentiment de vide...”

⁶⁴ É. Bréhier, *Les idées philosophiques et religieuses de Philon d’Alexandrie* [1^{ère} éd. 1908] 3^e éd., Études de philosophie médiévale 8 (Paris: Vrin, 1950). For an account see my *One Hundred Years*, 127-28.

⁶⁵ Bréhier, “Comment je comprends,” 8.

⁶⁶ Bréhier, “Comment je comprends,” 3.

⁶⁷ Bréhier, “The Formation of our History of Philosophy,” in *Philosophy and History, essays presented to Ernst Cassirer*, edited by Raymond Klibansky and H.L. Paton, 1st ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936) reprint Harper Torch Books (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 159–172 at 168.

general—from grasping the facticity of Christian life.... In the course of 1926, Plotinus' criticism of Aristotle does not count, in Heidegger's eyes, as a real philosophical development; and in the Summer Semester course of 1936 on *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom (1809)*, when his distance from Christianity is as great as his proximity to Nazism, Neoplatonism is represented as extraneous to the western and "German" philosophy. It is conceived as a late Greek philosophy compromised with "Jewish-Christian" (i.e. Oriental) thought.⁶⁸ In the *Beiträge*, Neoplatonism is connected with the Christian doctrines of creation, of God as *summum ens*, and of *analogia entis*. In the Winter Semester course of 1937/38, *Basic Questions of Philosophy—Selected "Problems" of "Logic"*, Neoplatonism is held responsible for the lack of true philosophy in the Middle Ages. This is on account of "the union with Christianity," resulting in the oblivion of the "great Greek philosophy." That arrived at its end with Aristotle.⁶⁹ In the section on "Mysticism,"⁷⁰ belonging to a treatise from the same period, *Besinnung*, Heidegger construes Neoplatonism as the starting point of all the subsequent development of mysticism, which, in turn, is considered as the specular image of metaphysics.

The treatment of "Mystik" in *Besinnung* makes no mention of Eckhart. In contrast, when he alone is named as one of the "old masters of thought"⁷¹ in *Gelassenheit*, this is not because he is Christian, or deeply Neoplatonic, but in spite of these. He is "Meister" because he is German, and, thus, capable of great philosophical thinking, in the way the Greeks from Anaximander and Aristotle once had been. Already, in the Winter class of 1934-35, *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein"*,⁷² Eckhart is set at the beginning of the German thought.⁷³ Luca Lera writes:

⁶⁸ See for example, Martin Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, translated Joan Stambaugh (Athens, Ohio/ London: Ohio University Press, 1985), (HGA42, 49), 27-28: "the so-called *summas* of medieval theology, too, are not systems, but a form of doctrinaire communication of the content of knowledge. ...[T]he *summas* are primarily directed toward teaching. They are handbooks." Heidegger goes on a little later "If an affinity to system is present in medieval shaping of knowledge, it is in the manner of subdividing and ordering degrees of the realms of Being." He fits the *Periphyseon* of Eriugena here, and says: "The influence of Neoplatonism is evident here too, that late Greek philosophy which is already permeated with Judaeo-Christian and Roman thought and which later actually was not without influence on the manner of the formation of systems." At Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise*, 31 (HGA42, 54): "Through German Protestantism in the Reformation not only Roman dogma was changed but also the Roman-Oriental form of the Christian experience of Being was transformed. What was already being prepared in the Middle Ages with Meister Eckhart, Tauler, and Seuse and in the 'German *Theologia*' is brought to bear in a new beginning and in a more comprehensive way by Nicolaus Cusanus, by Luther, Sebastian Frank, Jacob Boehme—and in art by Albrecht Dürer." At Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise*, 146, we find: "For the great beginning of Western philosophy, too, did not come out of nothing. Rather, it became great because it had to overcome its greatest opposite, the mythical in general and the Asiatic in particular, that is, it had to bring it to the jointure of a truth of Being, and was able to do this." (Hankey's note).

⁶⁹ HGA45, 220-1. (Lera's note).

⁷⁰ HGA66, §132, *Mystik*, 403-4 (written in 1938-39). (Lera's note).

⁷¹ Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking. A Translation of Gelassenheit [1944-45]*, by J.M. Anderson and E.H. Freund (New York: Harper, 1966),

⁷² HGA 39, p.123, 133-4.

⁷³ I owe this reference to Luca Lera.

Through the 30's and the 40's Heidegger interprets Hölderlin and his conception of the Holy with the help of Eckhart's mysticism. This mysticism, however, loses not only its Christian aspect, but also the Neoplatonic one: Eckhart's Neoplatonic (and Christian) conception of the origin as spring of the reality becomes the origin of the *Vaterland*; Eckhart's Neoplatonic (and Trinitarian) *epistrophé* becomes the return to the origin.⁷⁴

I conclude by testifying that I rejoice in the many forms of miscegenation which characterise Neoplatonism, and that, through this encounter between it and Heidegger, I am more convinced than ever of its philosophical greatness.

Tuesday, May 20, 2008

⁷⁴ See for example the course of WS 1941/42 *Hölderlins Hymne «Andenken»*, HGA 52, §59, pp.172-175, §§62-63, pp.182-188). (Luca Lera's note).